

Comments on Marijuana Legalization

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I am a physician and professor at UVM. My clinical work and research has focused on treatment of alcohol and drug addiction. I have participated in several NIH funded studies on marijuana use and cessation.

I believe the legislature did the prudent thing in decriminalizing marijuana use. This prevented the major downside of marijuana enforcement; i.e. overly harsh penalties that ruin young adults' lives plus it kept the important message that marijuana use can be harmful. My concern with legalization or the current effort to rewrite possession laws is what is the upside of doing so?

More importantly, data suggest there will be major downsides. Most, but not all, of the data from states legalizing marijuana have found decreased belief in the harms from marijuana and increased marijuana use. It is a certainty that increased use will lead to greater numbers of youths and adults walking around intoxicated. This will lead to more kids having trouble at school, more traffic accidents, more addiction to marijuana (which will can then lead to more heroin addiction), more psychoses, etc. And for what benefit?

Some will state marijuana is less harmful than alcohol. Even if this is true, this is a specious argument. I could easily show that texting while driving causes fewer accidents than drunk driving, so should we then allow texting while driving?

Finally, what is the hurry hear? It will take a good 5-10 years to know if legalization in DC, CO, WA worked out or not. Right now we have some conflicting evidence, but this is usually the case when new policies are introduced. Over time, these conflicts are resolved as better studies are done.